

OH, DRACULA: CHRIS BURDEN'S 1974 PERFORMANCE AT THE
UTAH MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

by

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ABSTRACT

On 7 October, 1974, Chris Burden wrapped himself in a fabric and adhesive tape cocoon and lay suspended from the foyer gallery wall of The Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA) for a total of eight hours. On either side of the cocoon hung two old master paintings, and below him stood two lit candle sticks. To the left of Burden's suspended body hung a wall plaque with text that read "Chris Burden, 1974, *Oh, Dracula*." Focusing on this understudied performance, *Oh, Dracula* is discussed through two visual "objects" derived from the 1974 performance: the published and singularly disseminated photograph, and the recently uncovered video documentation of the performance.

First, I discuss how the published photo works to situate *Oh, Dracula* as a challenge to the ritualized, modern display traditions of art institutions. In this photo, Burden's body is highly emphasized on the seemingly autonomous wall and vacant gallery space. I then compare elements of the published photo against techniques of tromp l'oeil using two paintings, *Venus Rising From the Sea-A Deception* (1822) by Raphaelle Peale and *Saint Serapion* (1623) by Francisco Zurbarán, to illuminate the elements of wit and ritual in *Oh, Dracula*.

The second and final section of the thesis discusses the twenty-five-minute black-and-white video found in the UMFA archives and recently moved to the University of Utah Marriott Library Multimedia Archive. Although the video was commissioned by

someone, currently unknown, there is nothing that points to Burden's involvement in or knowledge of the video, and as such, it should not be approached as its own artistic statement or creation. Rather, it gives additional information regarding the process, experience, and certain viewer interactions with the *Oh, Dracula* performance.

Organizing the timeline into three sections, the opening of the video as assistants complete the installation, UMFA director E.F. Sanguinetti's introduction and interaction with the performance, and finally the dismount of Burden's body I use the documentation of process embedded in the video itself. Through this video, I situate *Oh, Dracula* in relation to other Burden works and themes relating to the body, as well as how elements of ritual and tactility are highlighted in conjunction with the published photograph.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.	iii
LIST OF FIGURES.	v
INTRODUCTION.	1
SECTION ONE: TROMP L’OEIL AND RITUAL.	17
SECTION TWO: SANGUINETTI’S FORMULA, THE DOCUMENTATIONAL VIDEO.	39
CONCLUSION.	54
APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPT OF DIRECTOR E.F. SANGUINETTI’S INTRODUCTORY SPEECH . .	57
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.	60

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1 <i>Oh, Dracula</i> by Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974.	16
2 <i>Oh, Dracula</i> Archival photo 1, Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974.	36
3 <i>Oh, Dracula</i> Archival photo 2, Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974.	37
4 <i>Oh, Dracula</i> Archival photo 3, Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974.	38

INTRODUCTION

On 7 October, 1974, Chris Burden wrapped himself in a white adhesive tape cocoon and hung suspended on the gallery wall for a total of eight hours. Titled *Oh, Dracula*, the performance took place at the Utah Museum of Fine Arts (UMFA) in conjunction with the annual Western Association of Art Museum's (WAAM) conference, being held and hosted by the University of Utah that year.¹ On either side of Burden's cocoon, two old master paintings from the UMFA permanent collection hung, and below his head and feet were two lit candles.² Although the performance has been almost exclusively represented and discussed through a single photograph (Figure 1), selected and published by Burden, there is also a video that documents the *Oh, Dracula* performance, and sheds light on the details and procedures of this work.³

The video begins with Burden already suspended in his white cocoon. A woman takes gauze-like fabric and cradles it around Burden's exposed body parts: both feet,

¹ Zoe Alexandra Nelson Perry, "Chris Burden's *Oh, Dracula*: Secret Histories of the Avant-Garde in Salt Lake" (Honors Thesis, Degree in Bachelor of Arts, University of Utah, 2013), 18, and Mary French, "WAAM/WRC Conference," *The Western Association of Art Museums Newsletter* 2, Fall 1974, 2.

² To the left hung *Capriccio of Roman Ruins with Figures* by Gian Paolo Panini (Seventeenth century) and to the right, *Holy Family with the Infant St. John* by Francesco Brina (Sixteenth century), UMFA, online catalogue.

³ The individual who recorded this video is unknown. Found in the UMFA archives, the video was then transferred to a DVD and is now housed in the University of Utah, Marriott Library Multimedia Archives. The actual object is a SONY half inch, open reel or helical video tape. The shelf life of such magnetic tape is about thirty years, resulting in a poor-quality recording, despite it now being available in a digital format. Utah Museum of Fine Arts, audio visual collection, A1133, Reference Material for Chris Burden, performance piece at the UMFA, 1974. Special Collections and Archives. University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott. Salt Lake City, Utah.

and the back of his head. She proceeds to enclose any loose ends of the fabric with a roll of white adhesive tape. Starting from the base of the cocoon she stretches the roll to the top of the wooden plank attached to the gallery wall with seven flathead nails. To the left of the nearly enclosed body, a man nails a small, clear plastic plaque with black text to the wall. Without any official commencement, the video shows the foyer gallery space as visitors and conference goers flip through a Chris Burden catalogue. Walking up to the concealed form of Burden, three spectators intensely read the wall text for nearly a minute (despite it only being three lines long). The video then cuts to UMFA director Eugene Frank Sanguinetti, seemingly introducing the performance in the darkened room.

This video provides a glimpse into the process and visual context of this understudied performance. Although many of Chris Burden's works from the early to mid-1970s are widely discussed as seminal in the history of American body and performance art, the *Oh, Dracula* performance from 1974 has remained in relative obscurity. The event has been documented and described in books, catalogues, surveys, articles, and even web blogs, but has stayed within the periphery of each text's central argument.⁴

⁴ The following publications all make mention of the *Oh, Dracula* performance. Although O'Dell spends the most time discussing the work, most are brief, simply documenting the event using Burden's own published description. Greg Allen, "Art Doesn't End and Begin in a Physical Frame," *greg.org: the making of* (blog), entry posted May 30, 2011, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://greg.org/archive/2011/05/30/art-doesnt-begin-and-end-in-a-physical-frame.html>, Sally Banes, *Subversive Expectations* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 118, Burden, Ayres, and Schimmel, *Chris Burden: A Twenty-year*, 22. and French, "WAAM/WRC Conference", 2, Douglas Hoff, "Sculptor Chris Burden's into Concept Art Spirit," *The Utah Daily Chronicle* (Salt Lake City, UT), October 9, 1974, Carl E. Loeffler and Darlene Tong, *Performance Anthology: Source Book of California Performance Art*, updated ed. (San Francisco: Last Gasp Press, 1989), 152, Kathy O'Dell, *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Ralph

Many of Burden's works during the 1970s were violent and visceral in nature, often fueled by tests of bodily endurance. Examples include: *Trans-Fixed* (1974), where Burden crucified himself to the back of a Volkswagen bug; *Shoot* (1971), a coordinated shooting in which Burden was shot in the arm (and consequently had to be rushed to the Emergency Room⁵); *White Light/White Heat*, (1975) where Burden lay atop a raised platform for nearly a month, constructed in the corner of the Ronald Feldman gallery space, his body invisible to any viewer.⁶ In *Through the Night Softly* (1973), clothed in nothing more than briefs, with his hands tied behind his back, Burden crawled on his stomach across a floor covered in shards of broken glass.⁷ Burden's *Icuras* performance consisted of lying naked on studio floor with two long planes of glass affixed to his arms.⁸ The glass was then doused in gasoline and lit on fire.⁹ Throughout the years of 1971 to 1975, Burden proceeded to have himself crucified, shot, lit on fire, nearly drowned (*Velvet Water*, 1974) potentially electrocuted (*Doorway to Heaven*, 1973) and all around physically maimed.¹⁰ Art historians and critics have discussed Burden's early performance practice through a myriad of frameworks.

Daniel Cottom focuses on the misanthropic nature of Burden's work, arguing that the sublime violence of Burden's performances estranges the artist from the rest of

Rugoff, "Touched By Your Presence," *Frieze*, January/February 2000, Unknown, "Chris Burden's 'Oh, Dracula,'" *Avalanche*, no. 10 (December 1974): 14, Unknown, "Inflation Hits Museums, S.L. Conference Told," *The Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), October 10, 1974.

⁵ Frazer Ward, "Gray Zone: Watching Shoot," *October*, Vol. 95, No. (Winter, 2001): 114. See also Frazer Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2012).

⁶ The mentioned performances are all described in this book that surveys twenty years of Chris Burden's artistic practice. Chris Burden, Anne Ayres, and Paul Schimmel, *Chris Burden: A Twenty-year Survey* (Newport Beach, CA: Newport Harbor Art Museum, 1988), 167, 21, 15.

⁷ Lisa Phillips, *Chris Burden - Extreme Measures*, comp. Lisa Phillips (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2013), 224.

⁸ Phillips, *Chris Burden - Extreme*, 224.

⁹ Phillips, *Chris Burden - Extreme*, 224.

¹⁰ Robert Horvitz, "Chris Burden," *Artforum* XIV, no. 9 (May 1976): 26.

society.¹¹ Using Casper David Friedrich's two paintings *The Monk by the Sea* (1809) and *Two Men by the Sea at Moonrise* (1817), Cottom draws visual and conceptual comparisons between these works and Burden's 747 performance from 1973.¹² In 747, Burden fired a pistol at an airliner jet taking off from the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).¹³ The black-and-white photo taken of the event shows Burden's head and torso cut off at the bottom of the frame, with his right arm raised, gun in hand, and the 747 jet above. Cottom notes the visual similarities between Friedrich's work, as both paintings and the photo of 747 portray a disproportionate scale between puny human and landscape (or puny human and airliner), and pose the male figure against a melancholy horizon, "seeking to penetrate its mysteries."¹⁴ Cottom then connects these visual representations of the sublime to the concept of the misanthropist, the person (or artist) that critically and often violently positions him/herself between "humanity and humans."¹⁵ Cottom argues that in 747, Burden portrays himself as both solitary and abject: a representation of the artist as the misanthropist.¹⁶ Burden uses the popular icon of shooting a gun, in a manner of complete futility, to call into question the "comforting effects" of art.¹⁷

Tackling Burden's (arguably) most infamous performance, *Shoot*, Frazer Ward historically contextualizes the work through the lens of the Vietnam War and

¹¹ Daniel Cottom, "To Love To Hate," *Representations* 80, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 125.

¹² Cottom, "To Love to Hate," 130.

¹³ Cottom, "To Love to Hate," 119.

¹⁴ Cottom, "To Love to Hate," 121.

¹⁵ Cottom, "To Love to Hate," 122.

¹⁶ Cottom, "To Love to Hate," 123.

¹⁷ Cottom, "To Love to Hate," 123.

Minimalism.¹⁸ Burden describes the performance in clinical fashion, “at 7:45 p.m. I was shot in the left arm by a friend. The bullet was a yellow jacket 22 long rifle. My friend was standing about fifteen feet from me.”¹⁹ The event was eaten up by journalists, and Burden quickly became labeled “as the artists who shot himself.”²⁰ But Ward points out that *Shoot* was a collaborative event.²¹ Burden was shot by a friend, not himself, and when focusing on this vital difference, Ward poses new questions: How could someone be persuaded to shoot his friend, and why were audience members prepared to let it happen?²² Throughout this essay, Ward address these issues, shifting the focus of *Shoot* to the ethical questions it raises, as the performance critically engages with Minimalism and the Vietnam War.²³

Burden’s artistic practice was founded in Minimalist aesthetics, so it is no real surprise that a connection can be found between the object-based work of Burden’s earlier career, and the performance-based work of the 1970s.²⁴ However, Ward argues that *Shoot* comments on the “bloodlessness of Minimalism’s phenomenological investigations” introducing a new set of consequences that lie in the responsibility and participation of both the artist and viewer.²⁵ Ward makes note that like Minimalism, the simplicity and clinical nature of the description, but also the repeatability of the event,

¹⁸ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 114.

¹⁹ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 114.

²⁰ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 116.

²¹ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 116.

²² Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 118.

²³ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 118.

²⁴ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 119.

²⁵ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 119.

directly connects to Minimalist ideals.²⁶ But the question of why Burden would choose to get shot critiquing Minimalism still stands, and for this Ward turns to the historical context of the Vietnam War.²⁷

Many might impose a type of heroism to Burden, as if he were a “victim” but Ward moves away from this assumption and instead focuses on how images of violence were represented through the mass media, and in particular images of the Vietnam War.²⁸ Ward points out that the antiwar movement was galvanized by media reproductions of the events happening in Vietnam, but also desensitized the American public to these acts of violence, and as such places *Shoot* within this public context.²⁹ Ultimately, Ward argues that the primary audience of *Shoot* was analogous to that of witnesses who see, but do not intervene, in a street crime.³⁰ Ironically, Burden claimed that the audience was meant to identify with himself, the person being shot.³¹ But Ward argues that in fact, there is another layer involved, that of the –so-called ‘innocent’ bystander, consenting to this act of violence.³² *Shoot* refused to excuse its own created public (one that straddled the line of specialized art world and a more general public) from its fantasies surrounding spectacular representations of violence.³³

²⁶ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 119.

²⁷ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 120.

²⁸ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 121.

²⁹ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 121.

³⁰ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 124.

³¹ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 123.

³² Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 129.

³³ Ward, “Gray Zone: Watching ‘Shoot,’” 130

Others, such as Marla Carlson, and Dawn Perlmutter have analyzed Burden's work in comparison to the spectacle of ritual.³⁴ In Carlson's book, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics and Artists* (2010) she moves in and out of contemporary and medieval examples of torture and acts of pain.³⁵ She claims that these aestheticised spectacles of the past and present perform a type of cultural purpose, one that forms social memory and shapes different ways for spectators to respond.³⁶

Carlson proposes that the socio-political uncertainties of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are not all that dissimilar to the stresses of the postmodern, stating that the body in pain gives a much needed focus during these times of transition.³⁷ Throughout her book, Carlson compares a specific kind of twenty-first-century display of suffering to similar performances of pain from the Middle Ages.³⁸ Although many of her case studies encompass performances seen in New York since 2001, she spends a considerable amount of time discussing earlier twentieth-century performances from artists such as Marina Abramović, Gina Pane, and Chris Burden.³⁹ Drawing attention to Burden's *Trans-Fixed* (1972), Carlson states that Burden uses the act of crucifixion, clearly drawing upon religious images of Christ and other Christian martyrology, as a way to elicit an emphatic response from the audience, ultimately calling into question

³⁴ Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 35. and Dawn Perlmutter, "The Sacrificial Element: Blood Rituals from Art to Murder," *Anthropoetics* V, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2000): 5.

³⁵ Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, 2.

³⁶ Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, 2.

³⁷ Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, 7.

³⁸ Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, 117.

³⁹ Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, 160.

oppressive social and art-world structures.⁴⁰

Also focusing on *Trans-Fixed*, Dawn Perlmutter looks even further into how this particular performance utilizes violence and spectacle, relating it to sacrificial rituals.⁴¹ In this essay, Perlmutter focuses on several performances from various artists and how they relate to topics of flesh, blood, and pain. Perlmutter utilizes René Girard's theory of sacrifice that refers to the two natures of violence as harmful and beneficial.⁴² Girard argues that ritual is nothing more than a regular exercising of beneficial violence, and is achieved by sacrificial rites through the spilling of blood.⁴³ When discussing Burden's *Trans-Fixed*, Perlmutter frames the performance within these three contexts of flesh, blood, and pain, arguing that Burden utilizes his own flesh as the sculptural material, and through his act of crucifixion, elicits symbols of Christian mortification and purification.⁴⁴

Focusing more on the viewer's interaction, Kathy O'Dell argues that the masochistic tendencies of Burden's early performances create an unwritten contract of suspense between the viewing audiences and the act performed.⁴⁵ Throughout O'Dell's book *Contract with the Skin*, she uses Burden and other early performance artists to ground her argument of contractual masochism. O'Dell admits, however, that *Oh, Dracula*, and Burden's other less directly violent or masochistic performances such as *Bed Piece* (1972), where Burden lay in bed for twenty-two days, and even his earlier *Five*

⁴⁰ Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain*, 160.

⁴¹ Perlmutter, "The Sacrificial Element: Blood Rituals from Art to Murder," 1.

⁴² Perlmutter, "The Sacrificial Element: Blood Rituals from Art to Murder," 1.

⁴³ Perlmutter, "The Sacrificial Element: Blood Rituals from Art to Murder," 4.

⁴⁴ Perlmutter, "The Sacrificial Element: Blood Rituals from Art to Murder," 5.

⁴⁵ Kathy O'Dell, "He Got Shot," in *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 5.

Day Locker Piece (1971), where he stayed confined within a small school locker for five days, challenge her overall argument.⁴⁶ She states that these performances are more concerned with the artist's semi-absent body, and that *Oh, Dracula* in particular both critiques, and complies with, the workings of the art institutional framework.⁴⁷

When comparing *Oh, Dracula* to Burden's contemporaneous and previously mentioned performances, an eight-hour suspension wrapped in fabric and adhesive tape appears to be rather tame. Despite the vague gothic reference to a blood sucking Transylvanian Count, this performance is not directly about violence. In addition, looking at *Oh, Dracula* through a lens of visceral endurance, may, on the surface, seem like a marginal example of these. Although *Oh, Dracula* may not be a core representation of violence, or bodily endurance, it still engages with these concepts on some level, and I believe this work is far from marginal. *Oh, Dracula* intersects with Burden's other work through his play on presence and absence, image and touch, but departs in its witty challenge of museum display.

Oh, Dracula engages with the tactile body of the artist, as Burden's form is both present and absent, similar to *White Light/White Heat*. As Burden was laying on the corner platform of the Ronald Feldman gallery, the viewer entered an "empty" room. High above their line of sight, lying silent and still upon the platform, Burden's physical presence was invisible to them. In *Oh, Dracula*, as Burden lay wrapped and shrouded from the viewer's gaze, his form and weight was seen, but his actual body was covered,

⁴⁶ Kathy O'Dell, "Home Again," in *Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art, and the 1970's* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 66.

⁴⁷ O'Dell, "Home Again," in *Contract with the Skin*, 67.

absent from their sight.

In *Five Day Locker Piece*, Burden placed himself inside a University of California Irvine locker all day and night from April 26th to April 30th.⁴⁸ The locker's dimensions were two feet high by two feet wide by three feet deep.⁴⁹ The locker above him contained five gallons of water for hydration, and the locker below contained a five gallon bucket to catch his waste.⁵⁰ The walls of the locker created a barrier between Burden's body and anything outside. Molding his own form into the small confines of the locker space, the hard metal was unforgiving and no evidence of Burden's body could be seen from the outside. In *Oh, Dracula*, Burden's form could be seen through the weight of his body interacting with the flexible cloth and the tape that encapsulated him. However, both *Five Day Locker Piece* and *Oh, Dracula*, render Burden's physical presence as invisible. He is indeed inside the locker and the white cocoon, but the viewer is confronted with a barrier in each work, unable to fully engage with the artists' body.

During those five days and nights, students and others who knew of Burden's performance would go and 'watch' him as Burden sat crouched in the locker, but many people often spoke to him. Remaining silent in return, Burden recalls that some students/viewers morphed his artistic confinement into a type of confessional, using the metal barrier as a means of anonymity.⁵¹ As the viewers interacted with Burden's

⁴⁸ Liza Bear and Willoughby Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church of Human Energy," *Avalanche*, Summer/Fall 1973, 55.

⁴⁹ Bear and Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church," 55.

⁵⁰ Bear and Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church," 55.

⁵¹ Bear and Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church," 55.

invisible presence in *Five Day Locker Piece*, this interaction added a ritualistic element to the performance, originally unforeseen by Burden. *Oh, Dracula* intentionally calls upon the ritual of votive offerings through the placement of the lit candles. *Five Day Locker Piece* and *Oh, Dracula* integrate components of ritual practice: the locker serving as a pseudo-confessional, the candles mocking the ritualized museum experience.

White Light/White Heat, *Five Day Locker Piece*, and *Oh, Dracula* all embody aspects of the absent/present body of the artist. And *Five Day Locker Piece* and *Oh, Dracula* contain elements of ritual. Additionally, all three works contain some form of bodily endurance. Whether laying a top a platform for nearly a month, crouching inside a locker for five days, or hanging suspended and nailed to a gallery wall for eight hours, all three performances are pushing Burden's body to a certain limit. In these three performances, Burden's flesh is not shot with bullets, pierced by nails or lacerated by shards of glass. The violence that his body endures is more nuanced, as Burden pushes his physical limits through the act of fasting, or remaining sedentary and isolated. Despite the fact that *Oh, Dracula* and his other endurance driven works do not engage with the immediate violence seen in his other performances, this does not justify a peripheral reading of them. *Oh, Dracula* may have the shortest time frame among his endurance pieces, but he still lay sedentary and isolated for eight hours. This task was still difficult and uncomfortable when considering Burden's inability to undergo normative bodily functions such as eating, drinking, and relieving himself. Again the violence he underwent is nuanced and subtle.

Despite the several differences between the works described, all these performances engage with the underlying notion of the ephemeral and experiential: this idea that the work of art is a temporary moment, and is dependent upon the viewer's interaction or experience with the event. Performance artists of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Vitto Acconci, Marina Abramović, VALIE EXPORT, and Chris Burden (among many others), moved away from the singular art object and instead used their bodies and surrounding environment as their artistic medium.⁵² Taking place in a myriad of settings, be it galleries, museums, studios, or public spaces, these artist's would organize performances that gave an opportunity for the viewer to experience and participate on varying levels. The art was what happened in the moment, and however planned the event was, it would not/could not be replicated.⁵³ However, because the experience of the art is founded not in a singular object but rather an event, it resulted in the necessary use of film, video, or photo documentation to record the performance.

Despite these images often showing but a small moment or "snap shot" of a durational period of time, the photographs become principal records and/or relics of the events.⁵⁴ In a video compilation of performances narrated by Burden, he states that the film, videos, and consequently photos, were not the art itself, but simply records that he

⁵² Frazer Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 2.

⁵³ In the following books, Carlson and Howell analyze the tactics of performance art, but in particular, build a kind of formula for creating performance art that artists can apply to their individual practice. Both authors describe this concept of the experiential and its vital role in creating meaningful performance work. Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5, Anthony Howell, *The Analysis of Performance Art: A Guide to Its Theory and Practice* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic, 1999), 65.

⁵⁴ O'Dell, "He Got Shot," in *Contract with the Skin*, 13.

hoped would convey a sense of the piece beyond the initial moment it was performed.⁵⁵

The film, video, and photos, then, were meant to fill in the gaps for these ephemeral performances. And although no mention of *Oh, Dracula* is given in this video collection, its existence within Burden's performance trajectory allows it to be considered similarly.

In this thesis, I use two visual "objects" derived from the 1974 performance, the published photograph and the video documentation, to argue that the published photo of the *Oh, Dracula* performance works to challenge and mock museum display traditions, and the video documentation allows for a further look in to the process of this performance. First, I discuss how the published photo relates to perceptual tactics of tromp l'oeil painting, arguing that the composition of the photo challenges the tradition of museum display. Second, I discuss how the video opens up additional analysis of the use of Burden's body and another perspective on the elements of ritual found in *Oh, Dracula*, as director Sanguinetti introduces the work to the attending audience and Burden's body is removed from the wall.

Focusing on the photograph taken during the 1974 performance, I analyze the careful compositional choices of the image, arguing they create a ritualized and witty experience of the *Oh, Dracula* performance. Comparing the published photo against three archival images reveals the spatial realities of the gallery, showing alternative perspectives of the performance space. This comparison draws attention to the deliberate choices of cropping, framing, and the removal of known spectators seen in

⁵⁵ Electronic Arts Intermix, "Chris Burden: Documentation of Selected Works (1971-1974)," video file, 35:23, *UBUWEB*, accessed August 19, 2014, http://ubu.com/film/burden_selected.html.

the published image. I compare these elements of the published photo against tactics of tromp l'oeil, using two particular paintings, *Venus Rising From the Sea-A Deception* (1822) by Raphaele Peale and *Saint Serapion* (1628) by Francisco Zurbarán.⁵⁶ This comparison shows how the photo works to create a witty and ritualized experience of the *Oh, Dracula* performance that ultimately challenges museum display.

The second and final section of the thesis focuses on the 1974 video taken of the *Oh, Dracula* performance. Now in the University of Utah Marriott Library Multimedia archives, it documents twenty-five minutes of the eight-hour performance. The video often zooms in and out quickly, resulting in lost focus and blurred scenes. Much of the magnetic tape had already decayed when the object was located and a digital copy was made, causing the actual quality of the recording to be quite poor.⁵⁷ The video was most likely commissioned by someone from the University of Utah's College of Fine Arts, or the UMFA, but this information is currently unknown.⁵⁸ Because there is no documentation that shows Burden had any role in making the video, I believe that it should not be approached as its own artistic statement or creation. Rather, it provides

⁵⁶ Hanneke Grootenboer and others have argued that Dutch still life and other tromp l'oeil practices frequently acted as meta-commentaries on the act of perception. Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-century Dutch Still-life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

⁵⁷ Molly Rose Creel, interview by the author, J. Willard Marriott Library Special Collections, Salt Lake City, UT, May 22, 2015.

⁵⁸ Currently, the person who actually filmed the video is unknown. Trent Harris, an undergraduate film student at the University of Utah, claimed that he made a video for the College of Fine Arts during the *Oh, Dracula* performance, and donated a large bulk of footage to the University of Utah's Marriott Multimedia Archives. However, after watching the digital copy of the found footage, thirteen minutes into the video we actually see Trent Harris also filming the performance for a brief second before the cameraman turns away. The video shows Harris filming again at around the eighteen-minute point. This concludes that there were actually two recordings made of the event, the one I am discussing here by an unknown cameraman, and the second by Trent Harris. The footage made by Harris has not been recovered. Utah Museum of Fine Arts, audio visual collection, A1133, Reference Material for Chris Burden, performance piece at UMFA, 1974. Special Collections and Archives. University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott. Salt Lake City, Utah and Molly Rose Creel, interview by the author.

additional information regarding the process, experience, and certain viewer interactions with the *Oh, Dracula* performance. I organize the timeline of the video into three sections: the opening of the video as assistants complete the installation, UMFA director Sanguinetti's introduction and interaction with the performance, and the dismount of Burden's body. Focusing on these three sections, I use the documentation of process embedded in the video itself. Through this video, I situate *Oh, Dracula* in relation to other Burden works and themes relating to the body, such as absence and presence, and tactility versus image.



Figure 1 *Oh, Dracula* by Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974. Image reproduced by the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of CB Studio.

SECTION ONE: TROMP L'OEIL AND RITUAL

In the published photo of *Oh, Dracula*, a gallery space appears, at first glance, void of human presence (Figure 1). The photo displays a bulky white cocoon, vaguely alluding to the wrapped and suspended vampire, perfectly centered on the vertical axis. To the left of the cocoon is a small plaque with black text attached to the wall. Evenly spaced to the left and right are two old master paintings, likewise with their own wall text plaques. Directly below each painting is a wall outlet where their personal overhead lamps are plugged in. Beneath Burden's suspended body are two lit candles resting on the lattice-like wooden floor, one at his head (left) and the other at his feet (right). A black strip of rubber baseboard negotiates the joint between the floor and the gallery wall. The source of light cast above Burden's body is invisible, but the result casts a triangular shaped shadow beneath the cocoon. The candles also cast a glimmering shadow upon the waxy, varnished floor, each flame just barely puncturing the black baseboard. The framed paintings likewise cast shadows, the left a curvy pattern echoing its ornate frame, and the right a simple straight line. The varying shades of grey cast by the shadows upon the wall emphasize the curves and weight of Burden's enclosed and suspended body.

The wall behind him is also white, but the starkness of the adhesive tape and the blunt shadows allow his figure to have form and dimension. This combats the flattened

sense of space the camera angle assumes with the shallow linear perspective provided through the lines in the floor. The edges of the two paintings become the edge of the photo, forcing the three foci to the surface of the picture plane. Oddly, the lines in the lattice floor that merge into the two candles provide a sense of relatable space, one that our body could occupy. However, because any other object along the horizontal axis has been cropped out, the viewer assumes that the wall on which Burden and the paintings hang continues beyond the hard edges. The viewer is confronted with the three main objects and left to wonder what is beyond the frame of the photo.

On the surface, the *Oh, Dracula* photo could be seen as mere visual residue, archiving the temporary event. But the photo does more than simply create a factual record of the performance. The photo of *Oh, Dracula* also lays claim to a separate reality, one of playful, silent, ritualistic reference that works in tandem with the original performance. And despite his obvious inability to be physically active in taking the photo, the often intentionally small number of attending audience members in other performances, and the controlled number of photographs that could be taken during the events, suggests that Burden played an active role in selecting this particular image to represent *Oh, Dracula*.⁵⁹

Because of the ephemeral nature of Burden's performances, photographs were vital in documenting them. When photographs were taken that represented different moments of a particular performance, Burden and his studio was always careful and

⁵⁹Thomas Crow, "Mind Body Problem: Chris Burden's Performances," in *Chris Burden - Extreme Measures*, ed. Lisa Phillips (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2013), 50.

precise about owning and controlling the copyright laws of those images.⁶⁰ In an interview between Willoughby Sharp and Liza Bear, the publishers of *Avalanche*, a performance art centered magazine, Burden mentions that in many cases, his wife Barbara Burden was the photographer.⁶¹ Others included fellow artists and friends such as Phillip Cleveland or Phyllis and Alfred Lutjeans, all contributing members of Burden's team and studio.⁶² Regardless of authorship, the ways in which the performances were captured were carefully composed, or as Burden describes it, "frontal and crisp," and their dissemination was likewise intentionally controlled.⁶³ Although multiple photographs of one performance were taken, Burden would choose a single image or a select few that would then be distributed to the public published in books, magazines, newspapers, etc.⁶⁴

Because of the reliance upon visual documentation scholars writing about these performances depended upon remaining objects unless they were fortunate enough to attend the event. Many of the arguments that address Burden's performances are done so through Burden's written (and published) description of the work, what attendee's have described, but most importantly, the visual residue from the event itself. In O'Dell's analysis of performance work, Burden's practice in particular, she makes note that the majority of her and others' analysis is grounded in these photo records.⁶⁵ In the case of Burden's works, O'Dell argues that the photos elicit a certain response to the

⁶⁰ Loeffler and Tong, *Performance Anthology: Source Book*, 152.

⁶¹ Bear and Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church," 60.

⁶² Bear and Willoughby Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church," 58.

⁶³ Loeffler and Tong, *Performance Anthology: Source Book*, 152.

⁶⁴ Bear and Sharp, "Chris Burden: The Church," 59.

⁶⁵ O'Dell, "He Got Shot," in *Contract with the Skin*, 13.

pain he is enduring.⁶⁶ Here, O'Dell is concerned with the physical and physiological response to pain the viewer has to these records, whereas my analysis is founded in the viewer's visual or perceptual response to the images. When Burden's published photo is compared to the additional archival photographs (Figures 2, 3, and 4), more information concerning spatial conditions of the UMFA foyer gallery is provided, as well as a more contextualized understanding of the museum space as a whole.⁶⁷

Moving from the upper floor of the Park Building to the new Arts and Architecture Center the fall of 1970, the new UMFA building consisted mostly of concrete, interspersed with glass.⁶⁸ Parquet wood floors and wood beams added structural support and dimensional aesthetics to the ceiling.⁶⁹ Inside the gallery space, several island walls, painted white, acted as portioning devices between the various gallery spaces. These walls did not extend to the full height of the ceiling but rather stopped several feet shy. Behind the foyer wall on which Burden was hanging, the museum space receded into a myriad of display areas. Other island walls, parallel to the foyer wall, sectioned out areas for pedestals and statuary, consisting mostly of religious antiquities, an Egyptian collection and some tapestries.⁷⁰ A wall of glass with two swinging doors separated the lobby area of the museum from the actual foyer gallery.

⁶⁶ O'Dell, "He Got Shot," in *Contract with the Skin*, 13.

⁶⁷ Recently uncovered in the files of the UMFA archives by Zoe Perry and Monty Paret. *Oh, Dracula* by Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974. Images produced by the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of CB Studio.

⁶⁸ Ronald C. Allen, "A History of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts" (master's thesis, University of Utah, 2005), 83.

⁶⁹ The building where the *Oh, Dracula* performance took place is now the Film and Media Arts building on campus. The current UMFA building was finished and opened in in 2001. Allen, "A History of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts." 105.

⁷⁰ Allen, "A History of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts," 80.

To the left of these doors was a display of religious objects, an altar fresco of the Madonna and Child (fifteenth century), flanked by two Italian, sixteenth-century torchère (large ornate candlesticks).⁷¹ On the far left of this wall was a limestone statue of St. Catherine, made in the fifteenth-century.⁷² Beyond the St. Catherine statue was an additional gallery space, structured similarly with island walls interspersed with various objects and paintings.

In each of the archival images (Figures 2, 3, and 4), there are several viewers in the gallery space most with their backs to the camera, facing Burden's concealed body. In contrast to the frontal cropped composition of the published photo, these three images are angled to the right or left, showing that the seemingly continuous wall where Burden hangs in fact abruptly ends several inches from either side of each painting. One photo in particular takes the image from a significant distance, still documenting the primary elements of the performance, but also encompassing the surrounding environment (Figure 2).

In this photo, the light sources are no longer ambiguous. The camera has taken

⁷¹ Pointed lunette. Madonna in center of painting with Christ child on lap held by proper-right arm. Child's proper-right forefinger in his mouth. Proper-right side of Madonna face faded, only bare outline of eye visible. Head tilts gently, a gesture that combines with a far-off glance to the side to give her a pensive, mournful expression. Because the child's face is the best-preserved part, it is here that Lippi's style is truly revealed. Tousled hair, full cheeks with button eyes and a snubnose is typical of all Lippi babies. Architectural background consisting of a lavender-grey arch framing the central figures, flanked by vertical columns. Madonna dressed in a blue robe and red dress and the child is swaddled in shades of red. Filippo Lippi, *Madonna and Child*, 1437-1438, egg tempera on panel, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT, accessed May 31, 2015, <http://umfa.utah.edu/collections>. One of a pair of bronze candlesticks. Italian, from the Davanzati Palace. Unknown, *Italian, torchère*, 16th-century, bronze, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Decorative Art, Salt Lake City, UT, accessed May 31, 2015, <http://umfa.utah.edu/collections>.

⁷² St. Catherine stands in contrapposto pose. She wears a crown (or other type of head dress). In her proper right hand, she holds a palm frond as a symbol for martyrdom. In her left hand, she holds a book. She is wearing a red and blue dress beneath a red and blue robe that is draped over her right hand. Unknown, *St. Catherine of Alexandria*, 1475-1499, limestone, pigment, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT, accessed May 31, 2015, <http://umfa.utah.edu/collections>.

several steps back and tilted slightly upwards. It shows the concrete ceiling of the space mixed with wooden beams, and three distinct ceiling lights that diffuse cone-like beams onto the paintings and Burden's body. To the far left, we see the wall of glass with two heavy doors propped open and a flood of natural light that pours into the space.

Through this wall of glass was the lobby and main entrance of the museum. To the right, we see additional gallery spaces receding into the background with visitors mingling amid the pedestals and statuary. Visitors stand with their backs to the camera: a single man stands at the left and a group of three converses near the right. Both groups frame Burden's body and the lit candles, but the solemn silence that the published photo conveys is lost as the entire space is opened, and the once ambiguous lighting can be traced to the source. In this image the candles are still visible. However, in the other two photos (Figures 3 and 4), the legs of the standing viewers cover both candles, obscuring this significant feature.

In the published photo, the candles create a specific atmosphere of space and time. The flame reflects upon the waxy floor, elongating the actual candle and creating uncertainty about where the floor ends and the wall begins. The frontal view of the lit candles also references time, but not the ephemeral sense of the momentary typically associated performance art. Instead, the flame that will eventually melt the now solid wax suggests a more durational sense of meditative and contemplative time. The archival photos that show the candles blocked by the legs of visitors eliminate the flame and replace it with their contemporary fashion, featuring bellbottom jeans and shaggy haircuts (Figures 3 and 4). Regardless of what the visitors are wearing, their mere

presence places the image within a specific timeframe. In addition to the reference to time, the candles provide this sense of artistic ritual, relating Burden's body and artistic practice to an object of worship.

The empty floor punctuated by the lit candles creates a sense of ritualistic silence, as if the viewer was looking at a religious altar. The candles suggest a burnt votive offering given to the artist and his creativity. They become the connecting element that bridges the floor where the viewer is meant to occupy, with the wall on which Burden hangs. The bright spots created by the flames echo the silence of the space and allude to votive ritual, but rather than praying in a church, the viewer contemplates artistic form and ingenuity in the hallowed halls of a museum gallery, what Carol Duncan describes as modern temples culturally designated for contemplative learning.⁷³ The candles co-exist within the pristine space of the gallery, as captured in the installation photograph, causing a playful dialogue between these two components. This allows *Oh, Dracula* to both embody and satirically mock the modern museum aesthetic through reverberation of votive ritual.

This oscillating dialogue between satire and the sacred that the photo of *Oh, Dracula* works to assert is employed in Peale's *Venus Rising* through the covering of the goddess's body, and Zurbarán's *Saint Serapion* by portraying a dying saint adjacent an illusionistic cartouche. Both paintings and the photograph visually display a covered human form with flattened backgrounds, and conceptually call upon wit and ritual. My

⁷³ Carol Duncan, "The Art Museum as Ritual," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford University Press, 1998), 476.

aim in comparing these seemingly disparate mediums and artistic contexts is to tease out these elements of wit and ritual made apparent in the photograph of Burden's performance.

Peale's artistic career (1774-1825) consisted of painting mostly still lifes, and he rendered his objects with meticulous, tromp l'oeil-like detail. The genre of still life typically eliminates the human form and focuses on inanimate objects or foodstuffs. However, in Peale's *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* from 1822 (Figure 5), he cleverly covers a mythical female nude with a tromp l'oeil rendered still life object. The nearly square oil on canvas painting consists of a dark, almost black background dominated by a highly naturalistic white sheet, suspended by a likewise illusionistically depicted leather ribbon or strap, miraculously appearing from the top edges of the frame. Attached to the strap with two silver pins, subtly reflecting the diffused light, the cloth hangs, causing a deep V-shape in the middle as a result of the fabrics' weight. Puncturing through the top of the sheet just above the elbow, we see the arm and hand of Venus grasping a bundle of her hair. At the bottom center of the paintings, we see a single foot with small flowers beneath, barely visible below the ankle.

On closer inspection of Peale's *Venus Rising*, the viewer is confused as to where the actual painting ends and begins. The meticulously depicted weight of the fabric pinned to the strap makes a trapezoid outline of Venus' hand, framing the small section of elbow and forearm, emphasizing the tactility of the fabric and making it project outward from the concealed body. This element appears to be a sculpture attached to the surface of another painting. The attention given to the shadows in the cloth and the

creases of where it has been folded are far more detailed and modeled than the foot and arm of Venus, adding tension between the flatness of the background juxtaposed with the tactile mass of the cloth. The viewer is asked to enter a reality where they could reach in and fondle the fabric. However, they are jolted back to a different reality, one that remembers the image is merely paint on canvas, a flat, two-dimensional object that begs to be taken as something three-dimensional. The three lines of red stitching along the edge of the hanging cloth mobilize the viewer's eye to the bottom right corner, ending with a small black cursive signature stating the artist's name and date of the painting. The black text is another manipulation that jolts the viewer out of the three-dimensional reality that the curved and shadowed cloth asserts, reminding that the image is indeed just that: a painting with an author, as made clear by the signature and date.

The darkened background of the painting emphasizes the stark whiteness of the cloth, much like the hard edges and dark shadows of the *Oh, Dracula* photo emphasize the bulky white form of Burden's concealed body. Although in *Venus Rising* we can see a portion of her hand and foot, this fragmented anatomy and censoring sheet makes the body both visible and invisible. Like the lines in the wooden floor in the photo, they beckon the viewer to step closer towards the white mass, yet the candles and the flat white wall prohibits our physical and perceptual proximity into the space, removing Burden's suspended body from the realm of the viewer and into one of ritual silence, again, making Burden's form present but absent.

Although the text in the *Oh, Dracula* photo is illegible, its presence in the actual

performance plays a similar role to Peale's signature. The actual words are not revealed, but one can discern a plaque with black writing. The black text added to the sculpture-like cloth of *Venus Rising* playfully straddles the line of real and illusion, calling upon trompe l'oeil tactics that purposefully befuddle the viewer. The signature could be a black thread embroidered into the cloth, but is in fact just black paint, like the flattened background. The wall text that hangs on the white gallery wall creates a tension between what the viewer actually sees, and what they read through Burden's published description of the work. "Chris Burden, *Oh, Dracula*, 1974" tells the viewer that the obscure white mass is indeed the present human form of the artist, comically alluding to the famous Transylvanian Count, the literary reference ending at a vague similarity to a bat-like cocoon suspended and sleeping through daylight. However, the text and Burden's body are contradictory, as the invisible bulk of the body projecting from the wall is what the viewer reads, not the label. Like the signature in *Venus Rising*, the viewer is caught in a tug-of-war match between perception and reality: what can be read visually outweighs what is understood linguistically. The playful dialogue between illusion and reality asserts Peale's witty appropriation of the mythical female nude and the still life object, rendering the body both visible and invisible.

Alexander Nemerov discusses how *Venus Rising* explores Peale's anxieties towards the body as he satirically illustrates but also covers the goddess of love, created in a context where such bodies were considered as lascivious subjects for art.⁷⁴ Peale references the potentially sensuous body, but the overall image is dominated by the

⁷⁴ Alexander Nemerov, "The Deception of Venus Rising From the Sea," in *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812-1824* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 190.

white cloth. This concealment adheres to but also challenges these notions of figural modesty, and shows a witty nuanced relationship between a body that is almost there, and an object that dominates our sight.

The comedy of *Oh, Dracula* is played out in Burden's vague gothic literary reference, the white mass nailed to the wall that acts like a painting, looks like a sculpture, but is in fact a suspended human being. Like Venus barely visible above and below the draped sheet, *Oh, Dracula* shows the human form as visible and invisible. It comes into our field of perception through the weight of the white cocoon, but is only fully understood unless approaching the image with the outside knowledge of it containing the artist Chris Burden. It becomes a joke as the viewer contemplates the Burden's form as it hangs between the two oil paintings. They enter the gallery space via the photograph, as an observer but also a patron of the museum ritual.

In Zurbarán's *Saint Serapion*, there is also a playful dialogue acted out, this time, one of ritualistic devotion. Zurbarán originally created and offered the painting to Mercedarian monks as a subject of meditation for their funerary chapel.⁷⁵ According to legend, Peter Serapion was captured and tortured by English pirates.⁷⁶ They bound his hands and feet to two poles, beat, dismembered and disemboweled him, and finally partly severed his neck, leaving his head to dangle.⁷⁷ Without a single drop of blood, Zurbarán displays the violence through Serapion's bound hands, fallen head, and a

⁷⁵ Yves Bottineau, Jonathan Brown, and Alfonso E. Perez Sanchez, *Zurbarán: [publ. in Conjunction with the Exhibition Zurbarán, Held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, September 22 - December 13, 1987, and at the Galeries Nationales Du Grand Palais, Paris, January 14 - April 11, 1988]*, comp. Jeannine Batille (New York: Abrams, 1987), 102.

⁷⁶ Bottineau, Brown, and Perez Sanchez, *Zurbarán*, 102.

⁷⁷ Bottineau, Brown, and Perez Sanchez, *Zurbarán*, 102.

bulging bruise on his forehead. The entire background of *Saint Serapion* is black, flattening the space and pushing the body to front of the picture plane. The ropes that bind the wrists and forearms end at the edge of the painting, framing the victim but also ambiguously suspending him in space. Serapion's head falls to the viewer's left, resting upon his right shoulder, recalling that of Christ on the cross. The bulky white habit and scapular are rendered with illusionistic detail and fall to the bottom of the picture without any reference to his feet. The folds and shadows of the fabric contrast the flattened background, and the wrinkles of the habit are tactile. The linear folds and wrinkles are strikingly similar to the lines of the adhesive tape in Burden's cocoon, and the covered and suspended body of Burden recalls the weight of the bound Serapion. Pinned to the breast of the soon to be martyr is the scarlet, white, and gold shield of the Mercedarian Order.⁷⁸

The painting shows the victim in the moment of being bound and beaten, but before his actual martyrdom (the violent disembowelment and severing of the head is soon to be enacted). As already mentioned, the painting was made for devotional purposes, created to instill reflection and meditation for the monks of the Merced Calzada Monastery in Seville.⁷⁹ This image displays the tradition of rich martyrology, but also key vows of the Mercedarian Order, modeling Christian acceptance of suffering and resignation before death. The covered body in white, hanging with intense weight, visually parallels the *Oh, Dracula* photograph. However, the devotional intention and context of the piece is likewise interesting when compared to the candles and ritual

⁷⁸ Bottineau, Brown, and Perez Sanchez, *Zurbarán*, 102.

⁷⁹ Bottineau, Brown, and Perez Sanchez, *Zurbarán*, 102.

aura of the performance.

As already mentioned, the two candles create this allusion to time, but more importantly, a mocking reference to votive ritual. Removed from a cathedral (or monastery), the lit candles are now placed within the modern halls of an artistic institution. Like the monks who were meant to contemplate the suffering of the martyr, so too are the viewers of *Oh, Dracula* beckoned to enter the floor space of the foyer gallery to contemplate the balanced composition and weight of the white cocoon as it hangs between the old master paintings. As Duncun points out in her essay "The Art Museum and Ritual", certain markers denote what is designated and reserved for a special quality of attention.⁸⁰ The centered composition of Burden's body and the frontal positioning of the candles directly below the hanging figure are visual markers that beckon this special attention. Although Duncun argues that the art museum's often temple-like architectural components and display create the framework for this modern intellectual worship, the *Oh, Dracula* photograph displays this same kind of oscillation between the secular and the sacred.⁸¹ The candles echo the reverent silence of the space, emphasizing the suspended figure as they glow below it. The religious content of *Saint Serapion* and *Oh, Dracula* are echoed through the devotional intention of the painting and ritualistic reference in the performance.

However, there are other similarities through the use of illusory or *tromp l'oeil* techniques and text. At the bottom of the painting, there is an interesting passage in the folds of the habit. Just left of center, a strong diagonal fold presses to the front of the

⁸⁰ Duncun, "The Art Museum as Ritual," in *The Art of Art History*, 476.

⁸¹ Duncun, "The Art Museum as Ritual," in *The Art of Art History*, 477.

picture plane, as if the fabric was stuck together and then adhered to a pane of glass in front of the painting. To the right and left of this passage, the fabric hangs loosely, receding into the black space of the background, emphasizing this sole moment of adhesion. This reference to the flattened surface happens again at the right of the painting where a small *tromp l'oeil* cartouche or rectangular piece of paper is pinned to the black background, reading "B[eatus] (Blessed) Serapius. Martyred in 1240, Franco de Zurbarán 1628."⁸² The flattened folds and the curled cartouche create moments of illusory interplay, adding perceptual confusion for the viewer.

The body of Serapion occupies the black background as a three-dimensional figure, fully formed and naturalistically portrayed. But the cartouche is rendered just as naturalistically. The top left of the paper curls downward, creating a shadow on the text. This gives the paper its own sense of depth, existing simultaneously in the realm of three-dimensionality alongside the body, but also in its own realm, as it is shown pinned on the surface of the black background. This play on perception deserts the viewer in visual limbo: an in-between moment of what is real and what is perceived, as the viewer shifts between the body and the piece of paper. The fluctuating visual perception also happens with the cropping of the *Oh, Dracula* photograph, as the parquet floor subtly recedes illusionistically, but abruptly ends at the edges of the white wall. The use of text that states the name of the artist, title, and date of the painting written on the cartouche also relates to the wall text plaque used in *Oh, Dracula*.

The label read "Chris Burden, *Oh, Dracula*, 1974," and although this exact text is

⁸² Bottineau, Brown, and Perez Sanchez, *Zurbarán*, 102.

unreadable through the published photograph, the viewer can clearly make out a small plaque with black text to the left of his body and the other paintings, perpetuating this established institutional pattern. The actual text of “Chris Burden, *Oh, Dracula*, 1974” becomes a certain ‘manifesto’ in the vein of artistic institutional critique. The text asserts Burden’s body as fine art, and by hanging his body adjacent the two old master paintings, he creates this juxtaposition of textual and visual display, adhering to and challenging modern traditions of museum display. The white clean walls, and the frontal cropping of the paintings and Burden’s body, directly adhere to the notion of the ‘white cube’ installation shot, first outlined by Brian O’Doherty in his 1976 text, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*.⁸³

O’Doherty’s essay focuses on modern art, and the two old master paintings are clearly not examples of this, nor is the UMFA an art institution that collected and regularly hung modern works of art. However, as O’Doherty maps out the early display methods of French salons against the rise of what he terms “the white cube aesthetic” of displaying art, I argue that the UMFA was adhering to these modern display methods of which O’Doherty makes note.⁸⁴ Instead of stacking the paintings, one on top of the other, like a nineteenth-century salon, the modern twentieth-century mode of display gives each work of art “room to breathe.”⁸⁵

With the invention of the photograph comes what O’Doherty defines as the

⁸³ Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, expanded ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

⁸⁴ O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 16.

⁸⁵ O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 13.

“archetypal installation shot” that becomes a “metaphor for the gallery space.”⁸⁶ The installation photograph further enhances this modern aesthetic of display as the shots eliminate the body from the image, allowing it to be devoted to the works of art.⁸⁷ O’Doherty provides examples in of this through the black and white installation shots of Frank Stella’s early shaped canvasses, Kenneth Noland’s alternating horizontal color fields, and Helen Frankenthaler’s massive, reversed bleeding canvases.⁸⁸ All of these photographs that capture the works of art being displayed in the gallery space intentionally eliminate and trace of human presence. They often crop out adjoining walls and works, and focus solely on the singular work being exhibited. All show the clean white walls, dark wood, or concrete floors and clean evenly diffused light sources. Again, although the *Oh, Dracula* photo shows old master paintings and was taken in a museum that was far from considering itself a modern art institution, the *Oh, Dracula* installation shot parallels these other examples. The *Oh, Dracula* photo works to crop and frame Burden’s body, and eliminate any trace of visible human presence. The photograph establishes the limits of the gallery, causing the bulk of Burden’s form, framed by the old master paintings, to be the object of devotion or contemplation. In the *Oh, Dracula* photo, the shiny wooden floor, white walls, and ambiguous sources of light certainly relate to what O’Doherty claimed when he stated the archetypal installation shot created these “suave extensions of space, and pristine clarity” to the

⁸⁶ O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 15.

⁸⁷ O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 19.

⁸⁸ Photographs of the mentioned art works are figured in O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 28-33.

works hung.⁸⁹

In addition to Duncan and O'Doherty, Svetlana Alpers' essay "The Museum as a Way of Seeing" discusses how the museological institution frames cultural objects and brings special attention and meaning to them.⁹⁰ Instead of looking only at fine or modern art like O'Doherty, she describes objects related to cabinets of curiosity or other natural wonders, as they are re-contextualized into the parameters of the museum context.⁹¹ Through this re-contextualization of institutionalized display, Alpers argues that the museum conditions viewers to see these objects as important, similar to how both Duncan and O'Doherty state that the structure of the museum or gallery display ritualizes and denotes what should be given special attention and how.⁹² In Alpers essay, she neither praises nor condemns the structure of the museum. However, in Robert Smithson's essay "Cultural Confinement" (1972), he unabashedly critiques the configuration of the art institution.⁹³

Smithson states that works of art placed within the white room of the gallery become "inanimate invalids," patients waiting to be declared "curable or incurable."⁹⁴ He claims that the museum acts as a graveyard, a depository for lobotomized works of art. Ironically, when looking at *Oh, Dracula*, Burden's live yet still body is a playful iteration of this idea: the hanging form compared to the undead vampire straddles the line of living and dead, as a person and a work of art. Although the installation shot

⁸⁹ O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube*, 29.

⁹⁰ Svetlana Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, ed. Ivan Karp, unabridged. ed. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2014).

⁹¹ Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics*, 27.

⁹² Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics*, 31.

⁹³ Robert Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," *Artforum*, October 1972.

⁹⁴ Smithson, "Cultural Confinement," 155.

from the performance adheres to the certain traditions of modern display, because Burden includes the flaming candles and is living and breathing within the covered cloth at the time the image was taken, it challenges this notion of the museum space, problematized by O'Doherty and Smithson, and articulated by Alpers and Duncan.

Although the UMFA is not an institution devoted to modern art work, the museum is adhering to a modern tradition of display. The UMFA is trying to assert an amount of modernity with the even spacing of the paintings, the clean white walls, and simple parquet floors, and Burden is placing himself right within the framework of this assertion. As both Duncan and Alpers point out, the modern museum brings singular, specialized attention to the displayed objects, be they a giant crab shell or oil painting.⁹⁵ Similarly, the even spacing of the two old master paintings in the *Oh, Dracula* photograph with their adjoining wall text gives these paintings their own denoted attention. Burden works himself into this framework by hanging himself on the wall, and placing his own text plaque next to his body. But he also challenges this tradition because he is a living, breathing, human being, not a dead painting.

The wall text in particular challenges the notion of the pristine gallery space, and the viewer's perception, much like the cartouche in *Saint Serapion* and Peale's signature in *Venus Rising*. The continuity of the paintings and the white cocoon is disrupted by the text, but oddly connected, as each one describes the object on the wall. The passage in *Saint Serapion* where the fabric adheres to the front of the picture plane connects to the cartouche, likewise pinned to the surface of the painting. The wall text plaque in *Oh*,

⁹⁵ Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing," in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics*, 25.

Dracula inhabits the empty white space between the three foci of the performance, connecting them, but also disturbing the visual continuity the photograph begs to assert. The photo of *Oh, Dracula*, *Saint Serapion*, and *Venus Rising* all play with the viewer's sense of perception: between what is seen, what is invisible, and what can almost be touched. Adhering to certain ritual or religious qualities, all three images invoke a certain type of devotion: the goddess of love from *Venus Rising*, the intention to incite devotional reflection in *Saint Serapion*, and *Oh, Dracula* that calls upon votive ritual to elaborate the art museum as a new temple for artistic devotion. This photograph that represents the performance intentionally creates an environment of silent reverence in the hallowed halls of the art museum, flickering candles and all.



Figure 2 *Oh, Dracula* Archival photo 1, Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974. Image reproduced by the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of CB Studio.



Figure 3 *Oh, Dracula* Archival photo 2, Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974. Image reproduced by the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of CB Studio.



Figure 4 *Oh, Dracula* Archival photo 3, Chris Burden, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, 7 October 1974. Image reproduced by the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, courtesy of CB Studio.

SECTION TWO: SANGUINETTI'S FORMULA

THE DOCUMENTATIONAL VIDEO

Found in the UMFA archives in 2013, and recently moved to the Marriot Library Multimedia Archives, the SONY, 1/2" open reel, black-and-white videotape documents approximately twenty-five minutes of the eight-hour *Oh, Dracula* performance.⁹⁶ The video begins showing Burden's feet and head just poking through either end of his white cocoon, as unknown assistants converse and complete technical elements of the performance. A man nails a clear text plaque to the wall, and two candles are lit and adhered to the parquet floor. Once the installation components are complete, the performance (unofficially) commences, as visitors, conference attendees, and students, wander throughout the gallery space.

The video then shows the space as much darker, with the director Sanguinetti standing between Burden on the wall and the visitors in front. As Sanguinetti speaks, he reads from a prepared text describing details of a work that has no connection to the performance taking place behind him. (See transcript in Appendix.) Several times throughout this introduction, it appears the director loses his place. He often pauses after looking up and speaking to the audience, and must glance back down at the paper

⁹⁶ Utah Museum of Fine Arts, audio visual collection, A1133, Reference Material for Chris Burden, performance piece at UMFA, 1974. Special Collections and Archives. University of Utah, J. Willard Marriott. Salt Lake City, Utah.

in his hand. For the portions that he reads directly, Sanguinetti is in fact quoting from an Art Week review of Burden's most recent work, *Sculpture In Three Parts*, performed just weeks prior at the Hansen Fuller Gallery in San Francisco.⁹⁷ Throughout his speech, Sanguinetti intertwines his descriptions of *Oh, Dracula*, with the published review, alternating between the two. Upon closing his speech, Sanguinetti describes the parameters for the performance, as he states Burden will hang for eight hours. Concluding at 5 p.m. when the museum closes, visitors will be asked to leave, and the artist will be dismantled.

The gallery space is fully lit again, and the spectators are gone. Two men in suits enter through two glass doors at the left, and several assistants set up for Burden's removal. Both candles are blown out, now only small droopy stubs. The left side candle is removed, and two carts are rolled below the head and feet of Burden. A long padded museum bench is carried in and rested on the two carts. Starting at the feet and towards the head, just below and parallel to the wooden plank, a man takes a box cutter and slits the white cocoon. Slowly, Burden, wearing only briefs, is rolled out onto the make-shift bed. With his back flat on the bench, two assistants lift and lower it to the floor. Bringing his right knee up, Burden stretches his leg then raises his head and torso. Planting his feet on the ground he stands and stumbles. A woman takes him by the arm, leading him to a room at the right and back of the gallery. The last minutes of the video end with the assistants removing the right side candle, returning the bench to a different gallery space, and rolling away the carts.

⁹⁷ M.L. Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," *Art Week*, October 5, 1974, 3.

Although the opening scene and first six minutes of the video merely show the installation as it nears completion, there are still some key and interesting elements illuminated when comparing it to the published photograph. The video shows the process of enclosing Burden's body and the installation of the candles, whereas the photograph only captures a single moment. In the video, Burden's head and feet are clearly visible. He faces the wall with his head of hair towards the viewer. His feet are stacked one upon the other. Seeing his exposed hair and feet verify his body is indeed in the cocoon. In the published photo of the performance, Burden's body is both visible but invisible. The weight of his body is seen through the bottom contours of the cocoon, but Burden's actual form is covered from our view. Barely poking through either end of the cocoon, his head and feet seen in this video solidify the presence of his body. The fabric surrounding Burden's body informs there is a soft barrier between his skin and the sticky side of the outer shell. This inner wrapping makes his eight-hour endurance a tad more comfortable, but that much more confining. As the video zooms in towards the cocoon, we see the details of the tape. Every bulge, layer, and line can be seen, adding tactility to the surface of the white mass.

As the candles are lit, the small amount of wax, now melted, is dropped on the floor to secure each one in place. The candles are key to this performance, as they create this direct reference to time, ritual, and worship. In the photograph of *Oh, Dracula*, the candles and Burden's covered body appear to be on the same plane, as the frontal camera angle flattens the space between. The video shows that each candle is placed a few feet from the wall. The placement of the candles a distance from the wall

shows an intentional invasion of the viewer's space. They create a barrier between the space beyond the candles, where the viewer occupies, and the space contained within them, where Burden's body hangs. The candles become their own velvet rope of sorts, separating the viewer from the sacred work of art. In the video, the lit candles are intentionally placed away from the wall, creating this perimeter around Burden's body. His suspended form is emphasized and even further removed from the viewer, reiterating the importance of the covered body as the ritualized work of art. The video also shows a contrast to this removal as we clearly see a body within the (almost) cocoon in the beginning, knowing that the fully covered form suspended on the wall does in fact contain a living, breathing, human. Again, Burden's body is present, but then absent. Separating him from us are the candles and the white shell, emphasizing the importance of the white mass. As director Sanguinetti introduces *Oh, Dracula*, he stands between the viewer and Burden's body, creating yet another barrier.

The camera angle has shifted lower. We can just make out Sanguinetti's face, and the outline of Burden's cocoon behind him. This initial introduction captured in the video sets up an exchange between Sanguinetti and Burden. Although Burden is hanging silent and still, there is a dialogue being initiated by Sanguinetti: spoken words on the part of the director, and a silent, suspended body on the part of the artist. Throughout this spoken dialogue, Sanguinetti goes in and out of quoted text and his own thoughts.

Sanguinetti's speech uses M.L. Sowers' recent review "Chris Burden Performs," which focuses on Burden's *Sculpture in Three Parts*, as a platform for understanding *Oh*,

Dracula.⁹⁸ In *Sculpture in Three Parts*, Burden sat on a stool atop a raised platform near the Hansen Fuller gallery elevator doors.⁹⁹ With a tripod and photographer constantly present, they waited to capture the moment Burden would fall from his perch. Below his feet on the platform was a placard that read “*Sculpture in Three Parts*, I will sit in this chair from 10:30 am 9/10/74 until I fall off.”¹⁰⁰ After two days of sitting, Burden finally fell at 5:25 am 9/12/74. White tape marked the shape of Burden’s body where he fell, and within the outline was the word “forever” also written in white tape.¹⁰¹

In regards to this piece, Sowers makes the argument that Burden is more concerned with the process of the activity than the end product.¹⁰² As the viewers came and went while Burden was still sitting in the chair, they interacted with the constant potential of him falling. The waiting and watching was tantamount, not the final outline or impression of where Burden fell and landed.¹⁰³ Sanguinetti’s use of this specific review in conjunction with his own description does multiple things. It first relates *Oh, Dracula* directly to *Sculpture in Three Parts*, (or *Sculpture* to *Oh, Dracula*) as Sanguinetti uses Sowers’ thoughts through the lens of this present performance. It also aligns Sowers’ argument of process with how Sanguinetti interprets *Oh, Dracula*, including the interpretation of the wounded, dead, but still real body.

Just after opening with words by Sowers, Sanguinetti claims that “Burden simply

⁹⁸ M.L. Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," *Art Week*, October 5, 1974, 3.

⁹⁹ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹⁰⁰ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹⁰¹ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹⁰² Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹⁰³ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

wants to be a part of the normal museum...(pause)...formula.”¹⁰⁴ Stating the logistical timeline of the performance, Sanguinetti then returns to Sowers’ review, reading the portion that discusses the shifting importance from the “resultant object to the activity that produces it.”¹⁰⁵ Sanguinetti likewise relates *Oh, Dracula* to the activity, not the object, as he describes how the art is us (the viewer) coming in and looking at it (Burden’s suspended body). Again returning to Sowers, Sanguinetti quotes how the enduring remnants of Part Three of *Sculpture in Three Parts* (the outline of Burden’s body) seem only vague shadows of the act.¹⁰⁶ Sanguinetti then refers to the performance at hand. Motioning to the wall behind him, he comments on the soon to be haunted emptiness once Burden is removed. Sanguinetti is sure “that the wall will not be the same for quite some time,” referring to the absence, and remaining presence, of Burden’s hanging form in the confines of the museum, also making a lasting impression on the minds and memories of viewers. Continuing with his own thoughts, Sanguinetti again refers to Burden’s body as he admits to the artists’ gentle mockery of exhibition, stating that Burden is there, but not really there. Sanguinetti admits that we are confronted by the almost “insurmountable temptation” to touch and feel if Burden really is there (but begs us to please surmount).¹⁰⁷ Closing with another excerpt from Sowers’ review, Sanguinetti reads that Burden once told of a time when he had been accused of being a “polesitter.”¹⁰⁸ This refers to an early, U.S. twentieth-century pop culture tradition: sitting atop a flag pole as a test of one’s strength and

¹⁰⁴ A1133.

¹⁰⁵ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹⁰⁶ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹⁰⁷ A1133.

¹⁰⁸ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

endurance, but now in hindsight seen as a sensationalist scheme on the part of participants and easily entertained viewers.¹⁰⁹ “Yes”, Burden said, “I’m that too.”¹¹⁰

Cleverly appropriating this statement, Sanguinetti says that Burden could also be accused of being a picture. “Yes”, he might say, “I’m that too.”¹¹¹

Throughout this speech of personal thoughts interwoven with a published review, this video of Sanguinetti interacting with *Oh, Dracula* gives another frame by which we can understand and approach this performance. Sanguinetti attempts to make the argument that *Oh, Dracula*, like *Sculpture in Three Parts*, is focused on the process or activity, not the object itself. The correlation comes from the audience’s interaction, whether the viewers wait for Burden to fall, or feel the desire to touch his cocooned body. This interaction of touch is especially interesting, particularly with the tactility and texture of Burden’s cocoon, made even more apparent through the close-up shots seen in the video.

As Sanguinetti discusses this tempting desire to touch and feel Burden’s body, the director and artist have an interesting exchange. There is little information on the actual nature of Sanguinetti’s and Burden’s relationship, but it is known that Burden received an official invitation to create and perform a work in the foyer gallery on October 7th, 1974, and that the performance would coincide with the Western Association of Art Museums conference being hosted by and held at the University of

¹⁰⁹ Unknown, "Teaching the Young Idea to Sit on Flagpoles," *Literary Digest*, August 31, 1929, 34.

¹¹⁰ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

¹¹¹ A1133.

Utah.¹¹² Beyond this, there is no documented interaction between Burden and Sanguinetti. There are, however, some speculations in regards to Burden's "inspiration" for *Oh, Dracula*.

In several interviews or email correspondences with *Oh, Dracula* attendee's, conducted by undergraduate student Zoe Perry and myself, there have been a myriad of descriptions of the event. In Perry's interviews, student Trent Harris, and Bruce Lindsey, describe their personal response to *Oh, Dracula*, and the basic details that are widely documented.¹¹³ (In one of Perry's interactions with Harris, he distinctly remembers wondering how Burden managed to pee.)¹¹⁴ Through my own interviews with student Kent Lee Maxwell and art professor Tony Smith, both claimed they had personal conversations with Burden.¹¹⁵

In Tony Smith's conversation in particular, he stated that after a discussion with Burden, following the conclusion of the performance, Burden said that the title of *Oh, Dracula* was inspired by a portion of Sanguinetti's name: *sangue*, Italian for blood.¹¹⁶ Subsequently, this reference to blood then led to a representation of the most famous blood sucking vampire of all, Count Dracula.¹¹⁷ No other confirmation of this connection has been found. However, Smith's statement proves interesting nonetheless, when

¹¹² Burden, Ayres, and Schimmel, *Chris Burden: A Twenty-year*, 20, and French, "WAAM/WRC Conference," 2.

¹¹³ Perry, "Chris Burden's *Oh, Dracula*," 18.

¹¹⁴ Perry, "Chris Burden's *Oh, Dracula*," 21.

¹¹⁵ I interviewed Maxwell and Smith both in person and via email. However, the most useful information was gleaned from my personal conversations with them. Kent Lee Maxwell, "Burden Performance," e-mail message to author, October 23, 2014, Tony Smith, interview by the author, 252, W. Fern Ave. Salt Lake City, UT, March 10, 2015.

¹¹⁶ Smith, interview by the author.

¹¹⁷ Smith, interview by the author.

considering the interactions of these two figures, and the emphasis placed on Burden's body.

As Sanguinetti stands in front of Burden during the video, they are linked through their close proximity to each other. At one point, the camera actually shifts from recording the actual body of Sanguinetti and instead focuses on the shadow of the director that is cast on top of Burden's white, cocooned form.¹¹⁸ The lighting in the gallery space during Sanguinetti's introduction is such that anyone standing in close proximity to Burden's body projects their shadow on the wall. This additional moment when Sanguinetti is talking about Burden while the video captures the shadow of Sanguinetti visually connects the director and artist. And when Sanguinetti describes his desire (and presumably everyone else's) to feel the still, yet tactile body of Burden within the cocoon, Sanguinetti attempts to "possess" the artist's body through this action of touch. Sanguinetti, of course, does not physically touch Burden's body, but Sanguinetti clearly alludes to this desire. And Burden, the artist/vampire, seeks to possess the director's blood through his appropriation of Sanguinetti's name as the inspiration for the performance. With this attempted possessing of names, bodies, and blood, a nuanced dialogue, without any tangible interaction, arises between Burden and Sanguinetti. And through this desire to touch and possess, Burden's body becomes even more emphasized as the visual and conceptual focal point of the performance, a pattern seen in many of his early performance pieces of the 1970s.

To further explore the artists' covered, yet tactile and potentially wounded body,

¹¹⁸ A1133.

Burden's *Deadman* performance creates another intriguing comparison. On 12 November 1972 at 8 p.m., Burden lay down on the La Cienega Boulevard in Los Angeles covered by a canvas tarp with two flares placed at his head to alert cars of his presence.¹¹⁹ Just after the flares extinguished, the police came and arrested Burden for causing a false emergency.¹²⁰ The photo chosen to represent the *Deadman* performance shows a black canvas tarp with a bulging body beneath it. Directly behind the body is a cream-colored two-door vehicle, and directly in front are the two burning flares. The point of view is slightly below eye level, and the camera angles to the left. The car both frames the body, and echoes its diagonal composition. The diffused explosions of light in the lower right frame reflect on the rear end of the car.

In the *Deadman* photo, there are particular framing choices used to highlight Burden's body. Burden is caught between the two car tires, causing a purposeful ambiguity as to whether the vehicle has recently stopped, hit, or even belongs to the canvas mass abandoned on the asphalt. Although the performance took place on a busy freeway, the actual photo is void of movement, portraying the performance as a frozen crime scene, not a bustling highway full of traffic. Like the *Oh, Dracula* photo, the ambiguous lighting creates shadows across the composition, and the whiteness of the car counters the black tarp. The two flares are also similar to the candles in *Oh, Dracula*: conceptually acting as the only reference to time, and visually, as both are placed near the bottom of the frame, close to the covered body.

Beyond these visual similarities, however, the covered, still, and potentially

¹¹⁹ Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance*, 105.

¹²⁰ Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance*, 106.

wounded body of Burden is present (and absent) in both *Oh, Dracula* and *Deadman*. The staged car accident takes place within the perimeter of a busy highway, heightening the sense of risk and danger as Burden's body could indeed become wounded by a speeding automobile. The white cocoon seems to be cradling Burden's body. However, when we realize the longevity of his immobility, and see through the video the stiffness of his body as Burden is removed from his cocoon, again we more fully grasp the bodily stresses to which the artist was exposed. Falling from his perch and landing on the floor as described in *Sculpture in Three Parts* similarly addresses the concept of the wounded body, and draws parallels to *Deadman* as the outline of Burden's fallen figure resembles closely the site of a crime or murder scene. The absent and present bodies of Burden in *Deadman*, *Oh, Dracula*, and *Sculpture in Three Parts* highlight the paradoxical emptiness the covered (or outlined) forms assert: although the artist is indeed beneath the black tarp, suspended within the white cocoon, or was once in the outlined perimeter seen on the floor, the viewer's inability to fully connect with Burden's body creates this void or absence. And as Sanguinetti points out, once Burden's *Oh, Dracula* performance has concluded and his body is removed, the empty place on the wall where his form once hung will become void and haunting.

This reference to emptiness is derived through yet another comparison to Sowers' review of *Sculpture in Three Parts*, with the outline of Burden's figure relating to the empty wall space.¹²¹ (Sanguinetti fails to mention, however, the similar use of white adhesive tape, and how both works use this specific material to represent Burden's

¹²¹ Sowers, "Chris Burden Performs," 3.

body as present and absent simultaneously.) This process of emptiness however, is not something Burden ever discussed when describing *Oh, Dracula*, nor is it captured or even alluded to in the published photograph.

The outline and “forever” was the concluding third part of Burden’s *Sculpture in Three Parts*, whereas in *Oh, Dracula*, the outline of Burden’s form is about the ritualized experience the viewer has when looking upon its covered state. Sanguinetti briefly makes note of Burden’s gentle mockery in regards to museum exhibition, but does nothing more to extrapolate how Burden actually accomplishes this. The published photograph does this work. The emphasis on the candles and the cropped framing of his body makes it clear what the focus is, and how we should experience it: within the museum, we worship these intellectual creations. And although Burden is conforming to many of those traditions of display, his lit candles recall and mock this secular ritual. Despite Sanguinetti’s brief remark towards the mocking elements of display in his own description, the work itself and its representation through the photograph make this concept understood.

Finally, Sanguinetti closes with a reinterpretation of a statement made by Burden, claiming that when asked whether he is a polesitter, or a picture, both questions would receive an affirmative “Yes, I’m that too.”¹²² Sanguinetti is not only connecting Sowers’ argument surrounding *Sculpture* to the concepts seen in *Oh, Dracula*, but is now placing the thoughts and words of Burden into its very framework. Burden, however, embraces this cheeky query as he owns the possibility of him being

¹²² Sowers, “Chris Burden Performs,” 3.

just such a polesitter. Borrowing this cheekiness for Sanguinetti's own purpose, the director then states that Burden would equally embrace the notion of being a picture, making reference to the old master paintings, and Burden's own challenge towards museum display.

Sanguinetti gives a short introduction to the paintings hanging on either side of Burden's body, describing their names, dates, and titles. Claiming that Burden would consider himself a picture now connects the artist's body directly to the old master paintings, beyond this short mention of them. Visually, the three are connected through their congruent positions of spacing and hanging height. Conceptually, each has their own wall text plaques, giving all three equal descriptions and status, defining all as "art". These components are asserted by Burden through the photo of the performance and video, but when Sanguinetti adds this (potential) thought of Burden, it establishes another level of comparison and critique as Burden's still and concealed body is directly related visually, and now rhetorically, to the tradition of oil painting. Perhaps Sanguinetti is not only trying to possess Burden's body, but his mind as well.

After his final thoughts on Burden, Sanguinetti reiterates that the performance will promptly end at 5 p.m. The camera briefly moves to the left showing a display of religious objects, capturing the many visitors walking throughout the space.¹²³ The video then returns showing several hours later, after the performance has ended and

¹²³ These objects are Filippo Lippi's altar of the Madonna and Child, 1437-1438, tempera on panel. On either side of this are two 16th-century candle stands, and to the far left is a painted limestone statue of St. Catherine of Alexandria, 15th-century. All are a part of the UMFA permanent collection. <http://umfa.utah.edu/collections>.

Burden's body will be dismounted.

The doors to the museum lobby open and visitors file out of the gallery space. Jealous onlookers peer through the wall of glass, wishing they could likewise witness the dismount of Burden. Once the excess visitors have been asked to leave, the door closes and the foyer gallery is mostly empty, besides the two gentlemen, the cameraman, and those assisting in Burden's removal. With their flames blown out, the candles are now just nubs of melted wax. Seeing the candles melted establishes the reality of a linear timeframe. The photo captured this singular moment in time, circular and never-ending. The melted wax affirms the longevity and endurance of Burden's performance, reminding us of his eight-hour suspension. As the candles are now melted and blown out, but as the assistants construct the make-shift bed on which Burden's body will be rested, the entire process of his dismount becomes a new type of ritual.

The actual performance established an aura of ritual through the candles and framing of Burden's body. Now, despite the lack of flaming candles, and the cluster of assistants, a pseudo-altar has been constructed to remove the suspended figure. As the man slowly cuts open the white shell, the video zooms in to show Burden's body inside. Other assistants support the weight of his body and gently place it on the padded bench. The careful dismount and altar like structure for Burden's body recalls visual representations of Christ's descent from the cross. A nearly naked male body, deathly still and silent, is carefully gathered from a previous position from on high. As the bench and body are lowered to the floor, we hold our breath, wondering if the form inside is still alive. When Burden lifts his knee, there is an exhale of relief. His head and torso

rising are reminiscent of a resurrection. Whether Christ, Frankenstein, or Dracula, this dead but soon to be undead figure becomes animated with life. As he stands and stumbles, we see the bodily result of his eight-hour confinement. Quickly being led to a back room, we are left without any applause, bow or otherwise.

Throughout many of Burden's performances, he proceeds to die, and then be resurrected. *In Oh, Dracula*, this is no different. He lay shrouded and suspended for eight hours, silent and still. The final minutes of the video show his dismount, but ultimately his resurrection, as he rises from the museum bench and stumbles from the camera frame: now alive, ready to die again.

CONCLUSION

According to Sanguinetti, in *Oh, Dracula*, Burden inserts himself into the regular “museum formula.” This statement comes from the recently uncovered video of the performance. This assertion reinforces my argument of Burden’s critique of museum display as he both adheres to it, but also challenges it. The challenge of display is seen in the photograph’s manipulation of perception, the use of flaming candles, and a wall text plaque. The cropped and composed photo highlights the seemingly empty gallery space, emphasizing Burden’s cocooned and suspended body. The candles recall votive ritual, making reference to a new type of religious ceremony, and the text plaque utilizes an established art institutional tradition. By placing this informational text adjacent his live body, Burden subverts the established formula, and mocks the modern concept of the sacred work of art.

The ritualized elements of the performance are likewise highlighted throughout the video documentation as we see the process of the candles being placed, further creating a perimeter or barrier around Burden’s concealed form. The video emphasizes the tactility of the covered body and as Director Sanguinetti introduces the performance through the lens of a published review, elements of process and emptiness are highlighted. Throughout this introduction, a nuanced dialogue of possession between the artist and director is exchanged. In the final minutes of the video, we see the

dismount of Burden's body. This creates additional ritualized elements as the cocoon is cut open, and his form is removed, calling upon Christ's descent, and resurrection, as he rises from his pseudo altar.

The utilization of Burden's body is a pattern seen in essentially all of his performances, thus making *Oh, Dracula* congruent to any other work that uses the body as a form of sculptural material. In addition, the concept of the covered and wounded body is likewise seen in multiple works such as *Deadman*, *White Light/White Heat*, and *Sculpture in Three Parts*. Burden uses his covered form to create a paradox between the visible and invisible, a thread that connects many of these works. However, the key element that sets *Oh, Dracula* apart is the inclusion of museum critique. Placing himself within the formula of the museum via the paintings, hanging on the wall and a text plaque to boot, he is conforming to these established traditions of display. But with the inclusion of the candles, his cheeky title, and presenting his still and covered form as its own type of picture next to old master paintings, he is ultimately challenging the modern aesthetic of the art institution.

In Burden's most recent work created in the ten to fifteen years prior to his passing in 2015, he turned away from the violent abusing of his body and instead made large sculptural installations. Many of these engaged with science, technology, and machines, but still incorporated the key component of viewer interaction.¹²⁴ In his 1986

¹²⁴ For the 1999 exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London, *When Robots Rule—the Two-Minute Airplane Factory*, Burden set up a factory-like assembly line manufacturing model airplanes from tissue paper, plastic, and balsa wood parts.¹²⁴ In this exhibit, Burden was interested in the political, institutional, and technological, seeking to demystify symbols of authority and explain hidden processes. Burden sought to give ordinary people a greater understanding of how the

installation *Exposing the Foundations of the Museum*, Burden dug through the gallery floor of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary art, exposing the museums foundation piers.¹²⁵ Through this installation, Burden is physically and conceptually calling into question the literal foundation upon which the modern art museum is founded. By then asking the viewers to enter into the dugout space, Burden is likewise putting his audience at risk, understanding that the exposed piers and removed dirt could potentially collapse. Additionally, Burden applies his critique of power structures through the concretizing of what makes an art museum: just dirt and concrete, but then allows for further conceptual exploration as viewers contemplate the purpose of such institutions. Ironically, *Oh, Dracula* seems to be a precursor for a future trajectory of artistic practices that likewise engaged with the traditions of museum display, calling these institutional structures into question.

world functions and how the objects we use are manufactured. Frances Morris, Chris Burden, and Mary Horlock, *Chris Burden: When Robots Rule—the Two-minute Airplane Factory* (London: Tate Gallery, 1999), 6.

¹²⁵ Morris, Burden, and Horlock, *Chris Burden: When Robots*, 27.

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPT OF DIRECTOR E.F. SANGUINETTI'S INTRODUCTORY SPEECH

Italics=quoted text from M.L. Somer's review in Art Week, 1974.

Regular text=Director E.F. Sanguinetti

"...of a photographer, stationed opposite him to record the event. As new arrivals came Burden would glance, eh, into the elevator, aware of them, but offering no gesture or look of recognition. Umm, beyond Burden and the group of observers, the emptiness of the well lit gallery rooms reinforced and refocused the attention towards the artist. The placard below his feet read 'Sculpture in Three Parts, I will sit in this chair from 10:30 a.m. on the 10th of September 1974 until I fall off.'

In this particular instance, in this piece, Mr. Burden has wanted to be simply a part of the museum...[pause]... normal museum...eh...[pause] formula, alright? In other words, we have an Italian mannerist painting on one side, and we have an, eh, eighteenth century Italian veduta by Panini, and in the center is a piece entitled...[pause].. 'Oh, Dracula,' with the date. Umm, so. Eh, I will tell you now, because I think that your curiosity extends to seeing the piece took down, eh, that doesn't work. We hang him here, we take him down, uh, the gallery is closed it will usually be accomplished during the hours when the public is not here, so at that regular time we will close the gallery, then we will cut, umm, Mr. Burden down. We will, I think, video tape, however, to continue it.

Two days later and until the end of period allotted to the performance by the gallery, the elevator doors opened to an empty chair on a sculpture base and a placard amended to read '...until I fell off at 5:25 a.m.'

on the twelfth of September, 1974,

with the artists' signature marking the piece as complete. On the floor to left of the base was the chalked outline of Burden's fallen body with the work 'forever' written inside the now-vacant body area. Now, the structure of Sculpture in Three Parts,

this is the San Francisco piece,

parallels that of art-making. Burden ostensibly mounted the stand with his idea, stayed there until he had worked it through, stepped back and relinquished it to the public. He presented the continuum as tantamount to the isolated event...In their essential character of idea, action and result, the three parts of this piece are as traditional for artists as is the signature that marked the end point of Burden's work. What is obviously most untraditional about Burden's work is that he sifts the importance, the 'art' emphasis, from the resultant object to the activity that produces it.

The activity that produces this is your reaction, your coming in, your seeing the piece, your interplay, umm, with it...[pause]...

This focus on the human element is the force and integrity in Burden's work and explains the haunting emptiness of the Hansen Fuller Gallery after he completed his piece and left.

I daresay that wall will not be the same again for quit a little while to most of us who have been in and out of the gallery, eh, today when the piece is over.

Burden's sensitivity to the malleability of the distance between himself and the public allows him full control of that distance. His position...destroyed the space needed to place him in the comfortable perspective of an object.

Umm...[pause]...the gentle mockery of exhibiting himself on the wall as you see here, is offset by his isolation as an artist from us. There he is, but then he isn't there too, isn't he? You wonder about it. The temptation to, eh, to feel, to see if he is really there is almost insurmountable, but please do surmount. Umm, the last paragraph of the review reads as follows.

Chris Burden offers himself, in carefully selected instances, as artwork. He once told me about a time in Los Angeles when Jane Livingston told him that he had been accused of being a 'polesitter.' 'Yes,' he said, 'I'm that, too.'

He's being accused today of being a picture, I'm sure he would say 'Yes, I am that too.'

Let's step over and assess your own reaction. If it's possible let's have a close up.

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